

March 6, 2015

Good Evening APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE-thank you for staying and hearing all our testimonies. My name is Lyne Stokes and I am a registered voter in West Hartford.

This is a testimony Regarding the Governor's Proposed Budget Cuts of the RCAC/RMBH AND The Connecticut Legal Rights Project

Why on earth anyone would cut two programs that help others be independent in able to be of service to others? CLRP and the RCAC/RMBH are investments for the state and to take them away would actually be a burden on other state agencies like the DSS and the DOC. It's going to cost you more to spend less. They both offer light and hope that enable people they help to put their lives and families back together and keep the streets safe. They teach people to help themselves and that empowers those people to help the next guy who helps the next guy.

What facts do I have to back this up?

Personally, I am a woman with long term recovery. This means is that in 9 days I will celebrate ten years of not drinking alcohol and not being a burden on you. Without the community support of places like the Windsor Recovery Club, and CCAR and AU, I would be in jail or dead and my family would not be the loving and supportive people they are. My story is like many of the thousands of people that attend the club. I went to the WRC to support a family friend and ended up saving my own life and passing that gift of a great life forward.

I have been a volunteer for 10 years and on the board of directors of the WRC for 8 years. This is an entirely volunteer nonprofit organization whose mission statement is dedicated to supporting individuals in recovery from any SA or MH issue. We provide a safe and a sober environment collectively based on the principles of all recovery programs. This includes meetings, fellowship, educational activities and social events. The result is the enhancement of the lives of people and the communities in which they live.

We have helped thousands of men and women seeking relief from the devastation of Substance Abuse and Mental Health issues that they or someone in their family or their friends have gone through. We host a 24 hour Thanksgiving Alkathon that not only feeds a turkey dinner to anyone in need coming through the door but to anyone in the community who needs a turkey dinner has it delivered to them. We deliver 100's of meals to the senior housing centers in the community. We host a picnic or dinner for every major holiday for hundreds of people where not one drop of alcohol is consumed and where coincidently enough, no one ever gets arrested. We have a free open mic twice a month were 100's of musicians from all of the United States come to play for a crowd who can also eat a delicious low cost meal that is prepared and served by our volunteer kitchen staff. "Grill Bill" makes a great burger and anyone who has anything artistic to share can sign up "DJ Bill". There are no drunk drinking statistics leaving our club. The crime in the area has dramatically reduced since this club was established over 25 years ago. We actually have a wonderful relationship with the police in our community. Since it an 100 % volunteer organization with no paid employees it's all about one person helping another have a better life.

This would not be possible without the support of the RCAC/NCRMHB. The WRC depends on grants offered from the RCAC / NCRMHB to help educate and support our members and the community at large

organization regarding the issues from substance abuse and mental health issues. We are not DMAS funded and look forward to these grants to keep our organization free to anyone that comes to our facility. These grants help allow us to service everyone who comes through our doors. Phoebe Hamilton, from the RCAC/NCRMBH, has always reached out to us to educate and help us navigate any type of issue we may have when we are struggling on how to help service the thousands of people a year who come through our doors.

To cut these funds and grants would be detrimental to our organization and many organizations like ours. Please consider this carefully as the complete burden for cutting these funds will eventually fall back into the hands of the state when organizations like ours cannot continue to operate without help from outside agencies. **This WRC building is no longer blight on society like it used to be. Neither are the members of the WRC.**

I am grateful to be Director of Young Adults Services at Advocacy Unlimited for 8 years. I am a teacher and human rights advocate. AU gave me the ability to save my own life. I now guide young adults in human rights advocacy with an amazing program called Super Advocates. The focus groups for SA indicated young adults wanted to help other people and make a difference in life. 8 years and over 200 graduates later it's still the same mission yet always growing thanks to the young adult voice. There is a built in sustainably project so the young adults can always make a difference in any community where they live. There are now young adults working in the MH and SA field as peer mentors helping others get back on the right track. Thank you all that have supported the young adult budget knowing this is a huge investment in our future. These young adults-who are all registered voters - know that if programs like Connecticut Legal Rights Project and "the CACS" no longer existed they would not have the amazing lives they have. Without CLRP, a lot of these young adults would not be functioning members of society. Any legal issue is handled professionally and from the heart. I have been on many hospital – community transitions teams where CLRP has really fought for the best interest of the person who then adds value to the community where they now independently live.

Without CLRP, young adults and many individuals would still be institutionalized or in a hospital or prison or dead.

I get to the office very early in the morning to get work done. Without fail the phone rings and it's someone in need of legal help from either an institution or in the community. CLRP is our first defense against the offensive. After a long weekend Monday's are an especially busy phone days for people who, unfortunately, ended up in an hospital psych ward instead of their home where they belong because there was no crisis team available or at that time it was the only choice the crisis team had. **CLRP provides services to navigate successful independence.**

They also have classes like Advanced Directives that teach people how to help others to prepare this very important life saving document. **I don't know where we would be without my own father's AD's before he died. I can't imagine have issues and no resources and not able to navigate such any legal and important document. CLRP facilitates that process for people who don't have any resources.** It speaks for you when you no longer are well enough to speak for yourself.

Cutting both programs will result in a lot more than lost services. It will result in spending more money to lose more lives. Jails, death, hospitals and institutions would then be one of the only the solutions. Questions?